



# Esopus Creek Currents

a publication of Esopus Creek Conservancy, Inc., Saugerties, New York

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## New Preserve to Open in June 2011

by Steve Chorvas

In the fall of 2010, trail work began in preparation for the opening in June 2011 of *Falling Waters Preserve*, an exciting new public access preserve along the west shore of the Hudson River in the Town of Saugerties. The new preserve is the result of a collaborative conservation effort among the landowners, the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, and two area land trusts, Scenic Hudson and Esopus Creek Conservancy (ECC).



*Volunteers pause from trail work to pose for a photo.*

Twenty-seven eager volunteers turned out on a crisp November day. They helped restore an old neglected trail along the Hudson River, cutting back vegetation, removing fallen trees, and bench-cutting the foot path along sloped sections of the trail. By day's end the enthusiastic group had accomplished a great deal of work and successfully opened a riverside trail with elevated vistas.

During the ensuing winter months, Scenic Hudson has been working towards creating a parking area, entrance sign, and other landscape elements. The Preserve's Design Team, consisting of members of the Dominican Sisters, Scenic Hudson, and Esopus Creek Conservancy, continue to meet on a regular basis to address all of the details.

Recent discussions have focused on habitat enhancements. They include management of existing grassland habitat for the benefit of imperiled ground-nesting bird species and a proposal to apply for a New York State Department of

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*Falling Waters Preserve Entrance Sign*

*Photos Courtesy of Scenic Hudson*

Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) *Trees for Tribs* buffer planting of selective trees and shrubs along a tributary of the Hudson River. That will help slow and filter storm water runoff while substantially improving the current habitat for wildlife. Another proposal is to establish additional meadow habitat by limiting mowing of an extensive lawn area that would also provide an opportunity to introduce native grasses and wildflowers attractive to pollinators while complementing the planned installation of five beehives on the property.

While great progress has already been made, there still remains much work to be done in preparation for a June 2011 opening date. We plan to celebrate Earth Day on Saturday, April 23 by clearing trails of winter windfall, blazing all of the existing trail system, and perhaps by beginning to clear an additional trail traversing the edge of a former historic ice house site. Volunteers are needed. (See box below for details.)

ECC's Stewardship and Land Management Team will rely on local volunteers for long-term maintenance of this riverside landscape, as well as continued stewardship of nearby Esopus Bend Nature Preserve. Volunteers of all ages and experience are welcome and encouraged to lend a helping hand in preserving these irreplaceable local treasures while permitting year-round access for public enjoyment.

### Volunteer Trail-Building Day

at

### Falling Waters Preserve

on

Saturday, April 23 from 10: 00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

To register contact: Anthony Coneski

[aconeski@scenichudson.org](mailto:aconeski@scenichudson.org) or (845) 473-4440 x 273

# Nature Matters

## Revelations '11 by Spider Barbour



*Photo Courtesy of Kelly Myers*

As ice and snow melt away, and land and water thaws, among winter's revealed leftovers will be the remains of approximately 100 days of unrelenting turbid water discharge from the Ashokan Reservoir into the Esopus Creek. On the heels of New York City Department of Environmental Protection's (NYCDEP) subsequent three-day clear water "flush," in a February 3 press release the agency claimed the creek was demonstrably clean based upon NTUs, a standard turbidity index of how opaque the water looks, and is. The clean wash brought NTUs from nearly 50 down to 5, a big drop. The water is much clearer.



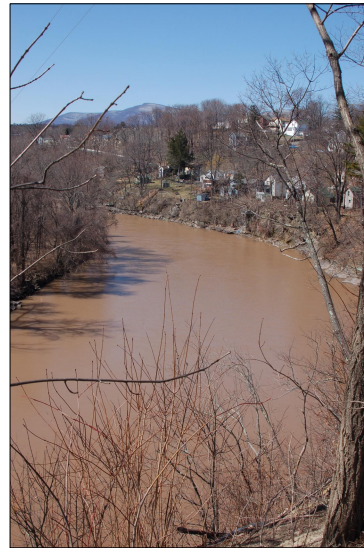
*Photo Courtesy of Kelly Myers*

But it's not just what was in the water (suspended fine material) but also what the water may have left behind. People have reported mud covering things, at least thinly — notably ice, but also logs, exposed shores, even swans.

The swans most likely got themselves muddy dunking for food in the creek bottom. But it does appear that sediments associated with the turbid release of 2010-11 settled right here in Saugerties. According to NYCDEP spokespersons, the turbidity-causing material was colloidal and non-depositional; it just floated by us and should be all gone. Are our senses not to be believed or trusted?

Turbidity is known to impair the functions of feeding, reproduction and breathing in many aquatic animals, and can damage plants by impeding photosynthesis and facilitating bacterial disease and insect damage. Sediment that settles on surfaces is an additional impact with many of the same and similar effects. A clean stream bottom is vital to aquatic animals of all sizes, floating and rooted plants alike, essential to the web of life itself.

We shall soon see how effective the flush was in washing away whatever mud the "chocolate river" laid down. Or will we? It's possible that an early flood will muddy up and swell the Esopus before the land is more gently laid bare, erasing the effects of the clean release.



*Photo by John Bassler*

The question will then remain, have the bottom edges of the creek been cleaned sufficiently to prevent significant loss of biodiversity and functionality? The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has demanded of NYCDEP a study of the impacts of the 2010-11 turbid water release. ECC endorses and will take part in the study if it happens, and learn and report what we can

in any case. But past data may not be sufficient for valid comparison with 2011 data. What can we learn? How should this knowledge direct New York City water supply policy now and in the future?

More immediately, how has this disturbingly eventful and difficult winter affected Esopus Bend Nature Preserve? Like the preserve itself that question is part of a larger set of questions, waiting like nested boxes to be opened and examined. Like any of us living anywhere, we're in the environmental center of everything — the Hudson Valley, New York State, the northeast, the North American continent, the hemispheres, the whole world. Take a good look around. It begins and ends right here.



## Wildlife Watching at Esopus Bend

by Stephen Hart

When venturing into the variety of habitats at Esopus Bend to watch for wildlife, I suggest you bring patience, binoculars, and a great deal of luck. Dawn, dusk, and overcast days are good times for watching. Active nocturnal hunters are best seen in the quiet and still of early morning, that is before we awake and begin our activities.

Dark, drab clothing that doesn't rustle is the best to wear. Be on full alert when moving around where wildlife is expected. I walk several steps, and then stop, listen, and look all around for a few minutes. The less obvious you are, the more likely you will see something extraordinary. If you see movement, freeze, or drop into a crouch. Because animals depend on their senses for survival, being silent and motionless is imperative.

However, being quiet and still doesn't prevent animals from catching our scent. Most animals have a very keen sense of smell so avoid using scented products. Once you spot an animal, resist the temptation to take out your camera right away unless you are far enough away not to startle the animal. I have observed many amazing dramas by simply posing as a statue.



Photo by Stephen Hart

*Great Blue Heron at Esopus Bend*

Another strategy is to find a spot, such as one of our benches, and sit still. After about 15 minutes, animals will forget that you are there and resume their activities.

A canoe or kayak is also an excellent platform for moving quietly along the shoreline or hiding in a promising location, such as the wetlands bay. Minimize paddle movement and boat noise. They can easily startle wildlife, so plan ahead. Wetlands are active areas for birds, but wetland birds such as ducks, herons, or birds of prey are extremely alert and difficult to approach. A rule of thumb to remember is, if an animal changes its behavior, you are too close. Treat all wildlife with respect, and give them space.

## Decks and Docks Tour on the Esopus Creek on Saturday, June 4 by John Baker

This tour is a delightful occasion, now entering its fourth year. The idea in creating the tour is to open our eyes to

Photo by Mary O'Donnell



*View of the creek from Esopus Drive*

the remarkable settings enjoyed by some of the residents living along the creek. At the same time, the tour helps support ECC. This is how it works: Much like the annual local Artists and Gardens tours in Saugerties and Woodstock, a number of people agree to open their homes and gardens to paying visitors for a summer's day. Homeowners are not gardeners or artists. However, what makes them distinctive is that they have created remark-

able riverside settings for their homes and themselves. These include striking views of the creek from both banks, secluded gardens, docks and swimming areas, waterside patios and decks. They are all designed to take advantage of the river's placid and scenic qualities.

*(Continued on page 4.)*



Photo by Mary O'Donnell

Visitors enjoyed creek-side camaraderie during 2010 tour

## Decks and Docks Tour on the Esopus Creek (continued)

At each stop along the route, with a detailed map provided, the visitor is entertained with food and drink, and the opportunity to enjoy the scene, and relish the company of hosts and fellow visitors. So the day is a chance to improve knowledge of some of the town's surprising corners, and also get to know the people who live there. The trip between the various creek-side settings can be made by car, rowboat, canoe or kayak; and for those who don't own a kayak or are not experienced at handling one, the organizers make a certain number available and offer assistance in learning how to get in and out (the hardest part). For ticket information, call 845. 247. 0664, or visit [www.esopuscreekconservancy.org](http://www.esopuscreekconservancy.org). **Rain date is June 5.**

## ECC Needs Your Help



Photo by Rita Galchus

If you have some free time and would like to volunteer for ECC, we need your help. Volunteers work on projects of large and small. You get to decide how involved you want to be. To receive our volunteer e-mails and learn more about volunteering, just

send your e-mail address to Volunteer Coordinator Rita Galchus at [eccrita@gmail.com](mailto:eccrita@gmail.com) or call 845.246.6875.



**ECC is grateful for the support of the  
KIWANIS CLUB OF SAUGERTIES  
Sponsor of the July 4th Celebration and Garlic Festival.**

*Esopus Creek Conservancy  
PO Box, 589 Saugerties, New York 12477  
845.247.0664*



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PO Box 589  
Saugerties, New York 12477

*Change Service Requested*

## Calendar of Events

- April 2** Exploring Vernal Pools  
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- April 23** Volunteer Day at Falling Waters Preserve  
10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- May 7** May Wildlife Walk  
7:30 a.m. - 6:00 noon or later
- May 7** Esopus Bend Paddle 9:30 a.m.
- June 4** Decks and Docks Tour on the  
Esopus Creek 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- June 5** Rain date for Decks and Docks
- June 18** Breeding Birds and Butterflies 8:00 a.m.
- June 25** Eastern Catskills NABA Butterfly Count  
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- June 26** Rain date for Butterfly Count
- June TBD** Opening Celebration  
for Falling Waters Preserve
- July 9** Butterfly Walk 10:00 a.m.
- Aug. 6** Butterfly Walk and Talk 9:30 a.m.
- Aug. 7** Rain Date for Walk only 10:30 a.m.
- Aug. 21** Animal Tracking Adventure 1:30 p.m.
- Aug. 27** Esopus Bend Paddle 9:30 a.m.
- Sept. 10** Mushroom Nature Walk  
9:00 a.m. - 6:00 noon
- Sept. 17** Esopus Bend Ramble 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 noon
- Oct. 8** Mushroom Nature Walk 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 noon
- Oct. 22** Autumn Wildlife Walk 8:00 a.m.
- Dec. 4** Animal Tracking Adventure 1:30 p.m.

***For details, go to [www.esopuscreekconservancy.org](http://www.esopuscreekconservancy.org),  
and click on calendar.***